**Tokyo, Japan**

Tokyo (東京, Tōkyō) is Japan's capital and the world's most populous metropolis. It is also one of Japan's 47 prefectures, consisting of 23 central city wards and multiple cities, towns and villages west of the city center. The Izu and Ogasawara Islands are also part of Tokyo.

Prior to 1868, Tokyo was known as Edo. A small castle town in the 16th century, Edo became Japan's political center in 1603 when Tokugawa Ieyasu established his feudal government there. A few decades later, Edo had grown into one of the world's most populous cities. With the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the emperor and capital moved from Kyoto to Edo, which was renamed Tokyo ("Eastern Capital"). Large parts of Tokyo were destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and in the air raids of 1945.

Today, Tokyo offers a seemingly unlimited choice of shopping, entertainment, culture and dining to its visitors. The city's history can be appreciated in districts such as Asakusa, and in many excellent museums, historic temples and gardens. Contrary to common perception, Tokyo also offers a number of attractive green spaces in the city center and within relatively short train rides at its outskirts.

**Central Tokyo (Chiyoda, Chuo)**

**Akihabara** (秋葉原), also called Akiba after a former local shrine, is a district in central Tokyo that is famous for its many electronics shops. In more recent years, Akihabara has gained recognition as the center of Japan's otaku (diehard fan) culture, and many shops and establishments devoted to anime and manga are now dispersed among the electronic stores in the district. Akihabara is also the birthplace of the ever-popular “maid cafés,” where customers dropping in for refreshments are greeted by young women dressed in maid uniforms.

Akihabara has also been undergoing some major redevelopment recently with the addition of the Akihabara Crossfield complex aimed at promoting Akihabara as a center for global electronics technology and trade, and a major renovation of Akihabara Station and surroundings. On Sundays, the main street is closed to car traffic from 13:00 to 18:00 (until 17:00 from October through March).

**Tokyo Dome City** is a leisure complex in central Tokyo consisting of the Tokyo Dome baseball stadium, an amusement park, the LaQua spa, a variety of shops and restaurants and Tokyo Dome Hotel.

The amusement complex used to be known as Korakuen, named after the former baseball stadium, which in turn was named after nearby Japanese landscape garden Koishikawa Korakuen.

**Western Tokyo (Shinjuku, Shibuya)**

**Shinjuku** (新宿) is one of the 23 city wards of Tokyo, but the name commonly refers to just the large entertainment, business and shopping area around Shinjuku Station.

Shinjuku Station is the world's busiest railway station, handling more than two million passengers every day. It is served by about a dozen railway and subway lines, including the JR Yamanote Line. Shinjuku is also one of Tokyo's major stops for long-distance highway buses and city buses. West of the station is Shinjuku's skyscraper district, home to many of Tokyo's tallest buildings, including several premier hotels and the twin towers of the Metropolitan Government Office, whose observation decks are open to the public for free. Northeast of the station lies Kabukicho, Japan's largest and wildest red light district, while department stores, subterranean malls and electronic shops surround Shinjuku Station on all four sides, including the recently redeveloped Southern Terrace.

**Shibuya** (渋谷) is one of the twenty-three city wards of Tokyo, but often refers to just the popular shopping and entertainment area found around Shibuya Station. In this regard, Shibuya is one of Tokyo's most colourful and busy districts, packed with shopping, dining and nightclubs serving swarms of visitors that come to the district every day.

Shibuya is a center for youth fashion and culture, and its streets are the birthplace to many of Japan's fashion and entertainment trends. Over a dozen major department store branches can be found around the area catering to all types of shoppers. Most of the area's large department and fashion stores belong to either Tokyu or Seibu, two competing corporations.

Yoyogi Park (代々木公園, Yoyogi Kōen) is one of Tokyo's largest city parks, featuring wide lawns, ponds and forested areas. It is a great place for jogging, picnicking and other outdoor activities. Although Yoyogi Park has relatively few cherry trees compared to other sites in Tokyo, it makes a nice cherry blossom viewing spot in spring. Furthermore, it is known for its ginko tree forest, which turns intensely golden in autumn.

**Northern Tokyo (Ueno, Asakusa, Ikebukuro)**

**Ueno Park** (上野公園, Ueno Kōen) is a large public park next to Ueno Station in central Tokyo. The park grounds were originally part of Kaneiji Temple, which used to be one of the city's largest and wealthiest temples and a family temple of the ruling Tokugawa clan during the Edo Period. Kaneiji stood in the northeast of the capital to protect the city from evil, much like Enryakuji Temple in Kyoto.

Today Ueno Park is famous for the many museums found on its grounds, especially the Tokyo National Museum, the National Museum for Western Art, the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum and the National Science Museum. It is also home to Ueno Zoo, Japan's first zoological garden.

Additionally, Ueno Park is one of Tokyo's most popular and lively cherry blossom spots with more than 1000 cherry trees lining its central pathway. The cherry blossoms are usually in bloom during late March and early April and attract large numbers of hanami (cherry blossom viewing) parties.

**Asakusa** (浅草) is the center of Tokyo's shitamachi (literally "low city"), one of Tokyo's districts, where an atmosphere of the Tokyo of past decades survives.

Asakusa's main attraction is Sensoji, a very popular Buddhist temple, built in the 7th century. The temple is approached via the Nakamise, a shopping street that has been providing temple visitors with a variety of traditional, local snacks and tourist souvenirs for centuries.

Asakusa can easily be explored on foot. Alternatively, you can consider a guided tour on a rickshaw (jinrikisha, literally "man powered vehicle"). A 30 minute tour for two persons costs around 8000 yen. Shorter and longer courses are also available.

**Ikebukuro** (池袋) is one of Tokyo's multiple city centers, found around the northwestern corner of the Yamanote loop line. At the district's center stands Ikebukuro Station, a busy commuter hub traversed by three subway and multiple urban and suburban train lines. The station handles over a million passengers per day, making it the second busiest railway station surpassed only by Shinjuku Station.

Ikebukuro offers plenty of entertainment, shopping and dining opportunities. It is the battle ground between the Tobu and Seibu conglomerates which operate large department stores on each side of the station, as well as train lines from Ikebukuro into the suburbs. Seibu furthermore has a stake in the Sunshine City, a large shopping and entertainment complex not far from the station.

While not as large or well known as Akihabara, Ikebukuro is also a center of otaku culture. Unlike Akihabara, Ikebukuro caters more to a female clientele with butler cafes and anime, manga and cosplay related shops such as Animate, Mandarake and K-Books. The center of the female otaku scene is located along Otome Road just north of Sunshine City. It is also said to be a good place to find dojinshi, or self published manga or novels, especially those produced for women.

**Southern Tokyo (Shinagawa, Minato)**

**Roppongi** (六本木, lit. "six trees") is a district in Tokyo that is well known as the city's most popular nightlife district among foreigners, offering a large number of foreigner friendly bars, restaurants and night clubs. Roppongi and the surrounding districts of Azabu, Hiroo and Akasaka are home to many embassies and a large expat community.

Two of Tokyo's largest recent redevelopment projects, Roppongi Hills and Tokyo Midtown changed the district's face over the past decade and expanded Roppongi's appeal to a wider range of visitors and residents with their elegant retail, leisure and residential space, offices and luxury hotels.

Thanks to the appearance of several art museums, Roppongi has also developed a reputation as a cultural center. The National Art Center is Japan's largest art museum, and together with Roppongi Hills' Mori Art Museum and Tokyo Midtown's Suntory Museum of Art forms the "Art Triangle Roppongi".

**Tokyo Land marks**

With 333 meters, **Tokyo Tower (東京タワー)** is 13 meters taller than its model, the Eiffel Tower of Paris, and the world's tallest self-supporting steel tower. It was completed in the year 1958 as a symbol for Japan's rebirth as a major economic power, and serves as a television and radio broadcast antenna and tourist attraction.

Visitors can ascend to the main observatory at 150 meters and the special observatory at 250 meters to get a bird's eye view of Tokyo. Under good weather conditions, Mount Fuji can be seen in the **distance.** An wax museum and several more attractions can be found on the ground floors of the tower. Separate entrance fees apply.

**The Tokyo Sky Tree** is a new television broadcasting tower and landmark of Tokyo. It is located in the Sumida City Ward, not far away from Asakusa. With a height of 634 meters, it is the tallest structure in Japan and the second tallest in the world at the time of its completion (Tokyo Sky Tree will open on May 22, 2012).

Tokyo Sky Tree Town is a modern development that includes the Tokyo Sky Tree, the 160 meter tall Sky Tree East Building and the Solamachi shopping and entertainment complex with many shops, restaurants, cafes, parks, a theater, an aquarium and more. It is conveniently located above Oshiage Station, and promises to be an exciting location to enjoy a day out for locals and tourists alike.

**Mount Fuji** soars to a height of 3,776 meters and the beautiful sight of this perpetually snow-capped peak has held people in awe for generations. Revered as the symbol of the nation, Japan's tallest mountain draws yearly crowds from both overseas and within the country looking to reach the summit during the July 1st to late August climbing season. Of the Fuji Five Lakes located around the base, Lake Kawaguchi is the perfect place to take in a spectacular view of the mountain. The first sight of Mount Fuji's majestic slopes up close is something you'll never forget so a trip to this easily accessible natural landmark comes highly recommended.

**The Fuji Five Lake** (Fujigoko) region lies at the northern base of Mount Fuji about 1000 meters above sea level around the lakes Kawaguchiko, Saiko, Yamanakako, Shojiko and Motosuko. It is one of the best places to view Mount Fuji from a close distance and a good base for climbing the mountain.

Fujigoko is known as a lake resort area, where hiking, camping, fishing and snow sports are among the popular outdoor activities that can be enjoyed. There are also plenty of hot springs and museums found in the area, along with Fuji Q Highlands, one of Japan's most popular amusement parks, featuring the Fujiyama and Eejanaika roller coasters.

Among the lakes, Lake Kawaguchiko is the easiest to access and offers the most things to see and do for the average foreign traveler. The four other lakes are less developed than Lake Kawaguchiko and are not as easy to access by public transportation.